

The Body and Blood of Christ (A)
(Deuteronomy 8:2-3.14-16 / John 6:51-58)
18.06.2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the gospel passage proposed to our meditation for the solemnity of the Body and blood of Christ, we heard Jesus saying:

“My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in Him”.

When we celebrate the Eucharist and receive the consecrated bread and wine in communion, the flesh and the blood of the Lord Jesus, an amazing intimacy with the Lord is offered to us. We live in the Lord and the Lord lives in us. This is a mutual inhabitation: communion.

But the Eucharist is not a kind of idyllic experience, an unrealistic fusion between the Lord and those who receive Him in communion. The Eucharist is a communion between two freedoms: that of the Lord and that of those who receive Him. What we celebrate is a communion in truth between the Lord with his unconditional love for us, and we who receive Him, with our joys but also and most of the time with our ups and downs, our sorrows and our failures.

When we come to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in communion, we come with the heavy burden of our sins, our addictions, and all sorts of things which hold us captive. We come with our shame, our guilt, our anxiety, our depression or our despair; we come with our anger, our enmities, our lack of respect of others, our difficulty – and even seeming impossibility to forgive. We come with our tiredness, the news of a terminal illness for ourselves or a loved one. We come in the aftermath of a natural disaster, a terrorist attack or a fire. We come with our tendency to save ourselves by our works in spite of having consented to be saved by grace, by another, by Christ our Saviour.

We come to celebrate the Eucharist with all that weighs upon us, hoping to welcome the compassionate, healing and saving presence of Christ into all these situations.

Perhaps you think that this long enumeration of human failures keeps us away from our celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ. This is not sure because, if we consider the context of the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear that the intention of the Lord Jesus was to give to his disciples a sign of hope in a time of crisis.

When Jesus sat at supper with the disciples together on the night before he died, it was really a time of crisis. It was not an idyllic occasion. The community of the disciples was breaking up: Jesus' ministry was humanly speaking an increasing failure – numerically, his disciples were a minority. Judas had betrayed Jesus; Peter was about to deny him; the rest of the disciples would be scattered. Jesus was surrounded more and more with people who refused his testimony to the Father's infinite love for every human being and because of this they wanted to take his life

In this situation of crisis, Jesus instituted the Eucharist as a sign of hope. It is when Jesus was facing opposition from his enemies who were thirsty of power, control and domination and who wanted to take his life that he turned the situation around; he imposed himself by his powerlessness, by giving himself as food and drink, by giving totally for others the life and the body he had received as a gift. Jesus offered to his disciples and through them to humankind, to each one of us His life that his enemies wanted to take from Him when He said: This is my body: take and eat. This is my blood: take and drink. Jesus transformed the perspective of death into a source of life. The institution of the Eucharist really was a sign of hope in a time of crisis.

At that moment of dispersion and disintegration, Jesus gave his disciples the gift of his Body and Blood. In doing this, he gathered them into the community of his body, uniting them in Himself. The gift of the Body and blood of Christ reminds us that in a time of crisis, the call for us is not to remain alone, but to join a community of faith and worship which can help us to get through our trial. The Eucharist is never about 'the Lord and me', but about 'the Lord and me as member of the Church', the Lord and me in the communion of the Church.

Facing such opposition, violence and injustice, Jesus could have chosen to follow his natural instincts: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. On the contrary, Jesus chose to break the spiral of violence and make his way through his trial with a pure heart, a heart filled with love and forgiveness. In this way, Jesus opened a path of hope for Himself and for all of us. Love is stronger than any sort of death.

When we receive Holy Communion, we engage ourselves to follow Jesus on his way of love and forgiveness. We choose to face and traverse all our trials with the warmth of love in our hearts. The way proposed to us here is an exacting way which has nothing to do with an affective fusion. It is not a capitulation, a sign of weakness, but a free decision which requires of us a lot of courage.

To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ in communion is to renounce the prospect of returning evil for evil, to choose with God's help to return good for evil, love for hatred, graciousness for bitterness, affirmation of others instead of jealousy, forgiveness instead of murder.

To receive in truth the Flesh and Blood of Christ in communion is to adopt a whole way of life that radiates more loving service of others than selfishness, more joy than bitterness, more peace than quarrels and wars, more respect of others than negative judgement, more empathy than anger...

When we engage ourselves on this path, we live in Christ and Christ lives in us, we become icons of Christ, we reflect the beauty of Christ all around us. We become beacons of hope. May the Lord grant us the grace to receive the sacrament of his Body and Blood in truth!